

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

NFAC #5006-78
9 November 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment
National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM : [REDACTED]
National Intelligence Officer for USSR-EE

SUBJECT : Warning Report: USSR

1. Action Requested: None; the attached report is for your information.

2. Background: Community representatives and Soviet specialists met on the afternoon of 31 October for the initial meeting on warning, with the NIO/USSR in the chair. After an initial discussion of the nature of the new warning process by the NIO for Warning the participants toured the horizon of current Soviet activities worldwide and examined a number of serious contingencies which could involve the Soviets. Participants were encouraged to explore low probability but not implausible contingencies whose occurrence would be of serious concern to US policymakers. New evidence bearing on these contingencies is to be reviewed at successive meetings so that their probability can be reevaluated. Attached is my understanding of the consensus of the meeting. It has not been coordinated with the participants, but is now being circulated to them.

Attachment:
As Stated

Distribution:

1 - DCI
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WARNING REPORT: USSR
(31 October 1978)

1. Summary. Intelligence Community analysts flagged the following contingencies as particularly worthy of attention during the next 60-90 days:

-- Escalation of the Indochina imbroglio and the possibility of growing Soviet involvement in it. Our concern stems from evidence that the level of violence along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border may soon rise, from growing commitments of prestige by the USSR and PRC to the respective combatants, and from what we perceive to be a growing sense of Soviet frustration over the USSR's inability to arrest adverse trends both in Asia and globally that are driven by anti-Soviet Chinese behavior.

-- A fair possibility that the Soviets could be drawn into intervention in Afghanistan should the unstable internal situation there degenerate into civil war.

-- Evidence that the Soviets are revising their estimate of the Shah's prospects for retaining power in Iran raises the possibility that they may abandon their current cautious posture in an effort to position themselves so as to influence the foreign policy orientation of any successor regime.

-- Soviet efforts to offset the harmful effects of Camp David on their Middle East position could predispose them to involve the USSR more directly on Qadaffi's behalf should there be renewed fighting between Egypt and Libya.

X1 -- [redacted] suggests that Brezhnev's gradually descending zig-zag health curve may be somewhat steeper than previously believed and that another serious bout with the flu this winter would accordingly be even more life-threatening than earlier supposed.

2. The Indochina Imbroglio. Our concern about the escalatory potential of this regional conflict and about the possibility of growing Soviet involvement in it stems from evidence that the level of violence may soon be raised along the Vietnamese-Cambodia border, from rising commitments of prestige by the USSR and PRC to the respective combatants, and from what we perceive to be a growing sense of Soviet frustration at the USSR's inability to arrest adverse political trends both in Asia and globally that are being driven by China and by positive third country responses to China's diplomatic outreach. Soviet

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efforts to discredit the PRC and to dissuade others from responding positively to Chinese advances, including Chinese bids to negotiate military technology transfers, have clearly failed. In the frame of mind induced by such failure and frustration, the Soviet leaders could be more strongly inclined to act forcefully against any Chinese intervention or conspicuous pressure directed against Vietnam should the conflict in Indochina grow in intensity in the next 60-90 days. The signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty several days after our warning meeting provides further evidence of the SRV's concern to secure Soviet backing against China in advance of stepped-up military activities in Cambodia, and of the USSR's growing investment of prestige and credibility in deterring Chinese pressure against Vietnam.

3. Afghanistan. Analysts saw a fair possibility that the Soviets could be drawn into military intervention in Afghanistan should the unstable situation there decay into civil war in the next 60-90 days. The increasingly close Soviet political and military involvement with the Afghan regime has coincided with a series of Kabul purges -- some evidently not endorsed by the Soviets -- which have progressively narrowed the political base of the regime and increased its vulnerability in the face of small-scale tribal revolts already simmering. Should the Soviets be drawn into a civil war, the US would be faced by immediate queries from Pakistan and Iran regarding the US posture in view of the heightened threat both would then perceive.

4. Iran. Analysts saw a possibility that continued disruption there could lead the Soviets to discard their present cautious posture toward the Shah's troubles. This caution has in the past been motivated primarily by the Soviet estimate that the Shah is likely to survive his difficulties and that the USSR will have to go on dealing with him. There is some evidence that Soviet views on this are now in flux, although they are still hedging their bets. To the degree that the Shah's chances continue to grow bleaker in Soviet eyes, the Soviets are likely to look for ways to take advantage of any sudden, new cataclysm to try to modify Iran's orientation toward the US and to blunt Iran's opposition to Soviet purposes in the Middle East.

5. Middle East. Soviet options in the Middle East are not promising, but analysts believe they will be exploring initiatives they could take to offset at least partially the harmful effects of the Camp David accords. They are likely to step up their support for the creation of a Syrian-Iraqi Eastern Front and might once again offer military assistance to Jordan in an effort to exploit Hussein's political vulnerability and sense of isolation in the wake of Camp David.

Analysts also thought that the Soviets were likely to furnish support to any eventual South Yemeni effort to revive the rebel insurgent movement in neighboring Oman, particularly since the Iranian military support furnished in the past to Oman to suppress those rebels could be diminished in the future in view of Iran's own difficulties. The Soviets are also likely to be supportive of the radical South Yemeni regime should it become embroiled in any clash with its enemy to the north, the Yemeni Arab Republic,

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Any of these three contingencies would multiply Saudi anxieties and bring a call for some US counteraction.

6. In addition, analysts saw one further Middle East contingency over the next two-three months which could impose serious choices on the USSR and the US if it came to pass. This is the possibility of a new Egyptian-Libyan military clash as a byproduct of the increased tensions between rejectionist Libya and Egypt that have flowed from Camp David. In the event of such a clash, the Soviets might be tempted to respond to a Qadaffi appeal for support, particularly in view of their own frustrations at their exclusion from the peace process. Although it does not seem likely, it is possible that the Soviets might be prepared to involve themselves more directly on Qadaffi's behalf today than they were willing to do during previous Egyptian-Libyan clashes last year. If the Soviets did provide some form of concrete military assistance to Libya during such fighting, Sadat would be likely to approach the United States.

7. Africa. We see a possibility that within the next 60-90 days the Soviets will have begun to substantially increase their efforts to regear Zimbabwe and Namibia guerilla forces for conventional warfare, and that this could be accompanied by a considerable further increase in the Soviet/Cuban presence in Mozambique and Zambia. Both the prospect of such heightened ZANU, ZAPU, and SWAPO capabilities and the additional Soviet/Cuban presence are likely to stimulate South African apprehensions and preparations for counteraction, bringing closer the likelihood of expanded regional conflict along racial lines.

8. Brezhnev's health. We flag this in the warning list not because of any radical recent change in Brezhnev's status, but because newly-acquired evidence suggests that his long-descending zig-zag health curve may be a bit steeper than we had suspected, and that the medical dangers he may face this winter could be graver than anticipated.

carefully vetted by the experts. But one tentative conclusion seems to be that another serious bout of flu -- such as the prolonged one he had last winter -- would be more life threatening than was previously estimated.